

CHAPEL OAKS V.F.D. 75TH ANNIVERSARY & GORHAM FAMILY TRIBUTE

HON. ANTHONY G. BROWN

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 14, 2021

Mr. BROWN of Maryland. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 75th Anniversary of The Chapel Oaks Volunteer Fire Department and pay tribute to Leroy and Lillian Gorham's first born children; Jean, Ruth and Leroy, Jr. On Saturday August 23, 1946 these children perished in a house fire at 1302 51st Street in the Prince George's County Community of Deanwood Park. The tragic loss of these three young lives was the cause for the establishment of The Chapel Oaks Volunteer Fire Department; Maryland's First All-African American Fire Company. Jean had just celebrated her 5th birthday and was slated to attend kindergarten in the fall, Ruth was a typical 2-year-old toddler and Leroy, Jr. was 11-months old and had taken his first unassisted steps that day. The Gorham family lived in the middle unit of a 3-unit house, where the fire engulfed all 3 units of the house. Neighbor and good friend Roy Lee Jordan attempted to save the children, but was unsuccessful.

The first fire department on the scene that day was from the District of Columbia. With the fire hydrant connections not being compatible, Engine Company 27 had to run their hoses across the busy thoroughfare of Eastern Ave. from the District of Columbia side to the Maryland side. According to those in the community, the nearby white fire stations in Maryland, which were minutes away from the Gorham's home, often responded slowly or not at all to emergencies in the surrounding African American communities.

The loss of his three children in a house fire was the motivation behind Mr. Gorham and his friend Roy Lee Jordan's personal mission to form a fire department and spare others the pain he suffered firsthand. Mobilized by this tragedy and determined not to let another person perish because of the racial discord, before the end of the year without any formal knowledge, experience or equipment; Mr. Gorham and Mr. Jordan along with members of the Deanwood Park and Chapel Oaks Communities founded the Chapel Oaks Volunteer Fire Department.

They started out in the 5700 Block of Sheriff Road in a barn rented to them by Ms. Eleanor Dodson, where they operated a small used fire engine. By August of 1947 the next year, they had a fire engine and a fire truck on Sheriff Road. Just as they were starting to make headway, in September a fire started in their makeshift firehouse; causing major damage to the building and damaging their second fire engine that was under repair. Not to be discouraged, the men of this community worked evenings and weekends mixing mortar and laying bricks to build a cinder block building with their own hands to replace the old barn that was destroyed.

This experience showed the men of this community that delivery of emergency services was not only a need, but a calling to fulfill. It was this innate spirit that they often had to lean on for strength to overcome the challenges and roadblocks they were faced with. They had to put up with blatant racial discrimination.

They were called racial slurs and spat on. And orders given by Black fire officers being ignored by white fire fighters.

Other fire companies supported Chapel Oaks privately, secretly leaving their old equipment at the firehouse when no one was around or selling their used fire engines.

Chapel Oaks also had to deal with the fact that the county fire association only accepted white males and Chapel Oaks VFD did not receive official calls. Yet they responded to alerts by their neighbors and often arrived before the officially dispatched units. It was routine for these fire fighters to respond to calls in their area without being dispatched. This level of dedication was a commendable, but it came at a cost. There were attempts to run their engines off the road while responding to a call and other fire companies taking credit for rescues made by Chapel Oaks was commonplace.

To meet the requirements to have two Class A fire service vehicles, this resilient group of men and grateful community put on bake sales, sold dinners, had carnival and held various fundraisers to raise money to buy a new fire engine. One volunteer was a businessman who put up his gas station as collateral, nine others took out second mortgages on their homes to support the effort to buy their first piece of new fire apparatus, a 1957 FWD.

Property at 5312 Sheriff Rd. was purchased for the organization by Mr. Charles Lancaster and the members once again set out to build their new firehouse. Eleven years after being formed in December 1957 Chapel Oaks VFD had a brand-new engine, to move into their newly constructed firehouse that they owned and still own to this day.

A decade and a half after being inspired to train and equip themselves, raising fund to buy their own vehicles, and building two firehouses. You would think that Chapel Oaks Volunteer Fire Department would have done enough to have proven their commitment to the fire service and their value to the county. This was not the case as they entered the 1960's and they were still not members of the Prince Georges' County Fireman's Association. Membership in this organization was important not only because of the network of fire fighters to glean information from and the official training opportunities; but most important was the eligibility to share in the county fire tax that would pay for operating expenses. Chapel Oaks had to petition the state legislature for a share of the fire tax-receiving 7 percent to other stations 31 percent-and residents complained that their local company was not automatically dispatched.

Almost 25 years since the tragic Deanwood Park fire, in March of 1971, Chapel Oaks was fed up with the obvious discrimination and filed suit against Prince George's County. The suit alleged noncompliance with the call system and the need for a new firehouse. At the time, equipment had broken down that impaired response times to its constituents and the station sought emergency funding from the county. Willie Rodney, Fire Station 38's chief at the time, summed up the frustration with the need for the lawsuit. "We do the same job and come to the same standards as the other companies. But all we've been getting are promises, promises, promises."

County Executive William W. Gallett threatened to withhold the request for emergency funding because of the pending lawsuit. The

county council granted the funding. By 1980 a new station was built and Chapel Oaks Prince George's County Fire Department included them in their system by designating the Engine No. 38. They also became members of the volunteer association attending annual convention, winning many parade trophies and garnering much deserved respect for their accomplishments.

Chapel Oaks has been a great asset to the community not only for delivery of emergency services, but the numerous lives that have been enhanced by their experience after serving with Chapel Oaks. Among them are Mr. Luther Cruchfield who was the First African American to be hired by Prince George's County Fire Department and Retired Fire Inspector Lenard Lewis was hired later and became the first African American to be promoted. There also was a young teen named Johnathan Bolden who just hung around the firehouse giving him something productive to do. Now a local businessman he has served in many positions at Chapel Oaks, VFD including Chief. As one of the few African American instructors he has filled a vital role at the University of Maryland College Park Fire Rescue Institute, and is a Prince Georges' County Fire Commissioner. He credits Chapel Oaks and the fire fighters there for nurturing his interest in the fire service and setting the foundation for his work ethic. There are generations of fire fighters serving in Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia fire departments that have been motivated, trained and mentored by The Chapel Oaks Fire VFD. They can always use good people and are excited about the opportunity to find new recruits, welcome them in the Chapel Oaks Family and train another generation of fire fighters.

The tragic death of Jean, Ruth and Leroy, Jr. was the driving force for their parents to create a legacy for them. They were determined that their children's death would not be in vain. Mr. Gorham held numerous offices during his 54-year career at the Chapel Oaks Volunteer Fire Department, including Chief, President and Chairman of the Board. He was a very active life member. His wife Lillian was also a member of the Chapel Oaks Volunteer Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary in the early years of its formation. With this year being the 75th Anniversary of the tragic fire which took these three young lives. I would like to pay tribute to Jean Gorham, Ruth Gorham and Leroy Gorham, Jr. They have done more in their death than many get to do in their lives. I would like to acknowledge the strength of their parents Leroy and Lillian Gorham. I would also like to recognize Mr. Roy Lee Jordan for his heroism and bravery, along with his determination to assist in the legacy of the three children that he was unable to save. I would be remiss not to commend the aforementioned communities and the countless numbers of people who have helped build, grow and maintain Chapel Oaks Volunteer Fire Department. In addition, I want to thank the current leadership of Engine 38 "The Oaks" as they continue to provide services to Prince George's County. On this 75th Anniversary I wish all the best to future members of Engine 38 and their contributions to the fire service and Prince George's County.

RECOGNIZING THE PROMOTION OF
R. DALE LYLES

HON. VICTORIA SPARTZ

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 14, 2021

Mrs. SPARTZ. Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Brigadier General Roger Dale Lyles on the confirmation of his nomination and promotion by the United States Senate to Major General. Since October 2019, Major General Lyles has served as the Adjutant General of Indiana.

For more than three decades, Major General Lyles has been a leader in the Indiana National Guard—from his service as platoon leader through his current posting. His numerous decorations and badges—including a Bronze Star and the Legion of Merit—speak from themselves.

Indiana volunteer servicemembers have a long and storied history of answering the call in the nation's Armed Services, from being the first to fulfill President Lincoln's quota for the Union Army to meritorious service in the War on Terror.

I congratulate Major General Lyles on this high and well-deserved honor, thank him for his decades of service to Indiana and the nation, and I look forward to his pinning in the coming weeks.

HONORING JAMES FREEMAN

HON. DAN BISHOP

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 14, 2021

Mr. BISHOP of North Carolina. Madam Speaker, today, I rise to honor James H. Freeman, Founder and President of the Emerging Technology Institute. On December 10th, Mr. Freeman was awarded a Native American 40 Under 40 award by the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development. These award winners truly represent the best and brightest minds in Indian Country, Mr. Freeman is a member of the Lumbee Tribe and it is a great honor for him to be included in this distinguished category. The Emerging Technology Institute is an integration hub for the Department of Defense, located in the town of Red Springs. I recently had the chance to visit ETI, where I got to fly one of

the many drones on site. I congratulate James once again on this honor. The Lumbee Tribe and Robeson County are very proud of him.

REMEMBERING HENRY CLYDE
HARRISON, JR.

HON. JOE WILSON

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 14, 2021

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Madam Speaker, I would like to take the time to remember a friend and great South Carolinian, Henry Clyde Harrison, Jr. Henry was someone that dedicated himself to the safety of his community as a Highway Patrol officer and worked to bring people together. He was instrumental in the development of American services and creating over 5,000 jobs. Our family is especially grateful for his counsel and support of Attorney General Alan Wilson.

HENRY CLYDE HARRISON, JR.

(February 21, 1932–December 12, 2021)

Henry Clyde Harrison Jr., 89, passed away on Sunday December 12, 2021 at his home in Greenville South Carolina.

Henry was blessed with a large and loving family. He is survived by his love and life partner Tracy Lamb, his children; son Randy Harrison (Beth), his daughters Carole Ann Owens (Kent), Pauline Joy Green (Tim), Austin Harrison, his grandchildren Heidi Boyce, Henry T. Harrison, Will Owens, Anna Ornelas, Carly Owens, Chase Green, Aiden Green, Honor Neely, Willa Green and Wynnie Green his great grandchildren Harrison, Caroline, Bailey, Ava, Lily, Lauren, and Alivia. He is also survived by his second wife Glenda Harrison and her children Kim Alexander (Donnie), Kellie O'Donald (Roger), and Al Harrison (Kim) and grandchildren Cody O'Donald, Carson Lollis, Kolby McCuen, and Brady Harrison, and great grandchildren Hadlee and Fallon all who he loved dearly. He was the last surviving child of the late Clyde and Pauline (Womble) Harrison. Henry was predeceased by his 10 siblings, Dot Floyd, Frances Ray, Elizabeth Baker, Lee Ellis, Mildred Lollis, Margaret Shenk, and Bill, John, Heyward, and Charlie Harrison as well as his first wife Carole Harrison.

Henry was born on February 21st, 1932 in the Union Bleachery community in Greenville, South Carolina before moving to Sans Souci where he grew up. From a young age, Henry exhibited 2 qualities that would come to be known as characteristics to all those who knew him; hard work and the ability to

make friends. When he was 6 years old, he had his first paper route, times were tough and he used the money he earned to help his family. He was known as the small boy; the one being followed by all the neighborhood dogs. He carried scraps and treats to feed them following the motto "better for them to be happy to see you coming!". Henry grew up in Greenville and graduated from Parker High School before joining the Highway Patrol and taking his first post in Cherokee County. On the patrol, he quickly distinguished himself as an officer who was truly there to serve. He believed that every single person he came across, on the job or in life, deserved to be treated with dignity and respect. He made sure everyone knew he worked for the people and it was his job to keep the roads safe for them and most importantly, their children. Through the course of his career on the patrol, Henry was able to move back to Greenville in 1962. While he never ran for office, Henry had a servant's heart and a love for politics. He was extremely active not only in the local Upstate community but in the entire state of South Carolina. He had no interest in partisanship, in divisive times he was known for working with everyone with the goal of bringing people together for the good of all. In 1975 he decided to retire from the Highway Patrol as a Sergeant and start his own company. Henry started American Security from his living room and quickly expanded it into a corporation that at various times served clients in seven states and employed over 5,500 people, known today as American Services. Henry believed in hard work. He classically stated, "The good Lord gives everyone 168 hours a week, how we use them is up to us." Henry proudly served as the Chairman of the Board and CEO of American Services until the day he went to be with his lord.

Henry, Chief, Big Henry, The Chairman, Slick, Dad, Daddy, Papa, Papa Slick, loved people for the entirety of his life and will be remembered for his love by his many friends and family while they wait to join him in the Kingdom of God.

Visitation will be held on Thursday December 16, 2021 at Mackey Mortuary at Century Drive from 4pm–7pm. A memorial service will be held at Sans Souci Church located at 3100 Old Buncombe Road, Greenville South Carolina, 29609 on Friday December 17 at 11:00 am. Entombment will follow the service at Woodlawn Memorial Park, 1901 Wade Hampton Blvd Greenville, SC 29609. In lieu of flowers, the family asks for memorials to be sent to Sans Souci Church, St. Jude's Children Hospital, Tri-County Vet Tech Program or Dr. William Schmidt and Dr. Susan Shi Legacy Fund and Institute for Child Success.